



Thailand: In August, artists from throughout South East Asia came to Bangkok, Thailand to compete in the coveted ASEAN Art Awards, founded and sponsored by the world's largest cigarette company, Philip Morris (PM). Despite meticulous planning of a full programme in several locations, the marketing people at PM did not anticipate a group of young people from Thailand and the USA crashing their parties. The young demonstrators staged their first protest outside the National Gallery of Art in Bangkok as artists, reporters and PM executives wine and dined at a reception inside. Next day, they followed the tobacco contingent to the ancient city of Ayutthaya, and joined a procession of elephants that the company had hired to lead its guests to an "artist interaction" activity among historic ruins. The protest was sponsored by the Thai Health Promotion Institute, and the US groups Essential Action and Reality Check.

there seems to be no health ministry unit, or other senior government agency, far less a sign of central government will, to respond in the necessary way when there appears to be a deliberate breach of the tobacco advertising ban: an immediate investigation, backed by legal powers to extract all necessary evidence, then, where appropriate, straight into court.

## Guatemala: PM's youth leaflets sent to homes

As Guatemala struggles with the tobacco epidemic, the government continues to buy the tobacco industry's rhetoric on youth smoking prevention programmes. "Yo Tengo Poder" (I have the power) is a programme led by Philip Morris supposedly to prevent young people from smoking. At face value, of



course, it looks like a legitimate programme, but as tobacco control advocates everywhere know, such programmes are at best ineffective, and at worst enhance the "forbidden fruit" image of smoking in children's minds, as well as marginalising opposition, blaming parents and society (not marketing) for youth smoking, and gaining unjustified credibility for tobacco companies by working with parents and in the community.

The brochure is being distributed direct to Guatemalan households. At the end there is an endorsement by the Minister of Education, and the fine print reads, "Produced by Lifetime Learning System Inc and financed by Philip Morris International Inc". As so often, in the fine print lies the truth. Health advocates, as well as staff from the Ministry of Education, should be made fully aware of the industry's strategy. In addition, it is the duty of people who

have access to the academic literature describing the industry's strategy, to make policymakers aware of the research.

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## Hungary: court victory on point of sale ads

Hungary chalked up another important victory recently when the high court ruled that point-of-sale (POS) tobacco advertisements visible from outside shops (in shop windows or entrances) were illegal. A string of court cases about such ads have been filed by tobacco control advocates since the country's advertising ban came into force in January 2002 (Hungary: tobacco ads forced back inside. *Tobacco Control* 2004;13:8). However, tobacco companies have continued to lobby the Ministry of Economic affairs and its enforcement agency to accept the companies' own interpretation of the law, which considered these ads to be legal. Now British American Tobacco, market leader, has reserved its right to challenge this important decision in the constitutional court. Health campaigners acknowledge that Hungary's ban is not total, but it only allows ads at the real point of sale, not in locations visible from public places.

## UK: cig as a parrot

British people, especially the English, have long been renowned for a tendency to treat animals better than humans. Such a generalisation, while always dangerous, may indicate wider opportunities for encouraging smoking cessation. Following several reports of people giving up smoking for the sake of their pet dogs and cats, a feathered friend has now joined the list of deserving victims after a serious respiratory incident. When the ailing avian, a parrot called Jay Jay, had to be put on an inhaler to help him breathe, his owners finally saw the light—and put it out for good. "Our smoking made Jay Jay as sick as a parrot," the couple were reported as saying, "but we are all better now."